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SUBJECT: OMANI REACTION TO JULY 16 POTUS SPEECH

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador on July 18, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Under Secretary Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi commended the President's July 16 speech on the Middle East peace process, emphasizing that "this is an opportunity that cannot be missed." He qualified his otherwise optimistic view by stating that Israel must be prepared to take risks to support Abu Mazen and show the Palestinians that they are serious about addressing Palestinian concerns. Sayyid Badr also urged that the Secretary, in her visit to the region later this month, go to Riyadh to personally solicit King Abdullah's "critical" support for the President's proposal.

12. (C) Sayyid Badr was supportive of the President's call for an international conference and hoped that it would have broad participation, including Syria and Lebanon. Al-Busaidi said that Syria was a "key factor" in the Middle East peace process and thus needed to be at the table. He further stated that the Omani government would consider issuing a statement of support for the initiatives in the President's speech, and added that he would call Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi (currently outside Muscat on an official trip to Moscow) to see if he might state something publicly on the subject, perhaps in response to a question by press.

13. (U) Several major Omani dailies ran international wire service stories in their July 17 editions on the President's speech. Due in part to the time difference between Washington and the region, there were no accompanying editorials or op-ed pieces on the speech that day. On July 18, an editorial in the government-owned, Arabic-language daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) called the President's initiatives, including an international peace conference, an "important" and "positive" step welcomed by the Arab League. It further stated that the timing of the initiative was opportune given negative developments in the region, but warned that "good intentions by themselves are not enough" in calling for a just and lasting peace that includes the return of Palestinian refugees, Syrian control of the Golan Heights, and the return of Shebaa Farms to Lebanon.

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